

Family Values: Father's Son

by Mapu

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Summary: Lucas is used as a means for revenge against his father.

Lucas Bridger story

Family Values: Father's Son

Family Values: My Father's Son

Family Values Series

> Father's Son<hl>

by Mapu

My seaQuest stories are set in the first series since IMHO that was the best series. I don't own the seaQuest crew - someone else does ... I just play with them. The Family Values Series are stories that have a strong focus on Lucas. This story contains strong violence.

Lucas pulled his favorite blue shirt off the top of the not-so-clean / not-too-dirty jumble of clothes in the box in the corner of his cabin. Giving it a quick sniff test, he decided it would be good for one more wear. Quickly rolling it up, he stuffed it into the sling pack he was taking with him on his first ever, official shore-leave.

He'd been on board the seaQuest for almost 4 months and had settled in so well that he couldn't think of anywhere else on the planet he rather live, on ... off ... or under the ocean. Certainly not with either of his parents, that wasn't likely to happen anyway. They had both made it abundantly clear that they didn't have time or room in their lives for him. Shaking away the dark thoughts, he grabbed his comb and toiletries bag and tossed them into the semi-full sling bag as well. Pulling the fasteners closed, he left his cabin, determined not to think about his family any more. It was time for some serious fun.

Several hundred meters away, two men sat quietly in their car, watching the seaQuest as it lay peacefully moored at the Florida UEO docking port. Both men wore UEO security uniforms with official UEO identification. Very expensive, real ID's that had been altered by a master so that the identification data matched the two men carrying them, rather than the original owners.

"Hey Tony? â€| How will we know which one he is?" the thin faced one asked his companion, watching the various uniformed crew of the seaQuest mill about on the docking ramp leading to the boat.

Tony Chipanel looked at his companion in exasperation. "How many 15 year olds do you think are crewing on board the seaQuest. Geez Charlie do you ever think?" Tony began, but stopped his tirade when he noticed a flash of colour among the uniformed people below. "There he is - the one in the orange shirt," he added to make it clear, even to Charlie, which one was the target.

Lucas exited the boat's main docking port and stepped out onto the boarding ramp. "All clear," he thought to himself and smirked a little. He'd been fast enough... if he managed to get past the crew here unnoticed, he'd be home free. He'd been trying to avoid running into Bridger since the announcement of shore-leave. If Bridger saw him he'd start laying down the rules. The way Lucas had it figured out, if Bridger never got the chance to set a curfew then Lucas was under no obligation to follow one. Half way across the pontoon a voice stopped him cold.

"There you are, I've been waiting for you to show up," Captain Nathan Bridger addressed his young charge.

"Ahh Captain. Yeah ... I've been looking for you too," Lucas replied. It wasn't exactly a lie. He had been looking for the Captain - so that he could avoid him. The Captain smiled and nodded knowingly at him.

"Of Course you were, we just seem to have been missing each other all day. Kind of hard to do, since we're both on the same boat," Bridger commented, knowing it would make Lucas uncomfortable.

"I've been busy," Lucas defended himself lamely.

"I see. Well, have a good time on leave," Bridger told Lucas then turned back toward the seaQuest, apparently dismissing the boy.

Lucas grinned in victory, for some reason Bridger hadn't set a return time. Just as Lucas turned to make his way up the ramp to freedom, Bridger's voice stopped him again. The Captain continued the conversation where he had left off, "And be back on the boat before midnight ... Cinderella," he told the teenager.

Lucas turned to make eye contact with Bridger and what he saw there convinced him there would be no bargaining and no extensions. Gone were his plans to stay ashore overnight. "Dismissed," Bridger told him, then made shooining motions with his hands toward Lucas. Lucas frowned irritably and left, before seeing the smile that he knew was

pasted over the captain's face. For some reason he couldn't work out, Captain Bridger took great pleasure in teasing him. "Adults â€| who would ever want to be one," Lucas thought to himself.

"Here he comes, remember we only get one shot at this. Don't screw it up," Tony instructed as his companion got out of the car. Before getting out of the car himself, Tony Chipanel loaded the small stunner he carried with a fresh charge. His orders were simple, get the kid - alive, but there was no stipulation on how healthy he had to be. With luck, the kid wouldn't give them any trouble, but if he did Tony was ready.

"Are you Lucas Wolenczak? Could you step over here for a moment son," Charlie addressed Lucas as he passed the UEO car.

Confused, Lucas stopped. "Yeah, I'm Lucas," he replied, stepping closer to the car.

"I have a message from your father. He wants to meet you at his office ASAP. I've been instructed to escort you there," Charlie said, faultlessly delivering the lines he'd been coached to say.

Lucas's confusion grew. His father wanted to see him? For a brief moment his heart leaped with hope, but then he realized how unlikely it was. Even if his father did want to see him, it would be Captain Bridger, not some strange UEO security type who told him. A little suspicious, Lucas stopped his approach.

"Okay, but I need to check in with Captain Bridger first," Lucas said, making up the excuse on the spot to buy himself some time to think.

"Your Captain has already been informed. Please come with me," the guard said a little impatiently. Charlie, able to see behind the kid, was aware that the encounter had drawn the attention of a tall, dark haired Lt. standing just at the top of the ramp.

Lucas was not sure what was going on here, but there was one thing he was sure of. If the Captain had known anything about this, he would already have been told. That meant the UEO security guard was lying to him. Feeling a small kernel of fear grow in his heart Lucas backed up a step. He found his way blocked by another UEO guard. "Charlie, can't you do just one simple thing right," the other guard spoke irritably. Lucas noticed for the first time the small device in the new guard's hands, and recognized it immediately. He tried to shout for help but before he could make a sound an intense wave of pain washed over him. His consciousness fled, even before his body buckled, falling limply to the ground.

Captain Bridger's attention was drawn from his discussion with Commander Ford about the dry dock maintenance schedule by Lt. Krieg's shout. Nathan looked up at the Lt. on the dock, who was running toward a car. The car attracted Nathan's attention even more completely than the Lt. had when he noticed the blonde head of the person the two occupants of the car were shoving into the back seat. He ran toward the car. He didn't realize he had cried Lucas's name

out or that he had almost knocked Ford to the ground in his rush to the ramp.

Before Lt. Krieg could reach the back of the vehicle, the two men had already gotten in and sped off ... taking Lucas with them. Nathan came to a halt at the top of the boarding ramp and turned to Commander Ford, who had just caught up with his captain. "What the hell is going on here? Pull out all our resources, I want Lucas brought back here and I want it done now," he ordered.

Lucas opened his eyes to a dimly lit room,. There was almost nothing in the way of furniture in the room. Lucas propped himself up onto his elbow and waited until the wave of dizziness passed. He was amazed to find he wasn't afraid, just very tired and more than a little sick. He tried to concentrate on his surroundings, not that there was much to see. A small, partially screened alcove held a toilet and wash basin. The only other items were the musty smelling mattress he lay on and a plastic chair. Everything smelled, a stale, old fish smell that seemed to be embedded into the cement of the floor and walls.

Lucas smelt the fabric of his shirt and grimaced, this had been one of his favorite shirts but he doubted he ever again get it free of the smell. It was also very quiet beyond the walls of his prison, the only sound that came clearly to him was the continuous cries and squawks of seagulls. 'I'm near the sea' he realized. The thought of being so close and so far from the Captain and the rest of the seaQuest crew saddened him and he wondered if they even knew of his predicament yet.

Lucas looked at his watch only to find it wasn't there. A quick inventory of his person showed that all his personal effects were gone. His watch, wallet even the ring from his finger. One item had been added though, a thick metal band encircled his left leg, attached by a thick sturdy looking chain to a bolt driven into the floor.

"Talk about overkill," Lucas croaked, lifting the heavy chain in his hand. His throat was raw and dry. He got shakily to his feet, deciding to test the length of the chain. It looked like it was long enough to reach the sink and at that moment a drink of water was highest on Lucas's priorities.

Forced to rise slowly because of the pounding pain in his head, Lucas slowly made his way to the small basin. Turning on the tap, he was relieved almost to tears to see the stream of slightly brown water gush and splutter from the faucet. Catching the water in his cupped hands, he drank it greedily. He followed his first handful by a second then a third as fast as he could.

The water may not have been the clearest that Lucas had ever seen but he couldn't remember ever tasting any sweeter. So it took him by surprise when his body suddenly and violently rejected the water he'd just drunk.

Lucas fell to his knees after he had finished throwing up, his hands still gripping the edge of the basin. He'd always thought it was an old wives tale, telling the injured not to drink their water too

fast, now he knew better. When he could stand again, he drank some more water. This time sipping it slowly, he was amazed to discover it didn't taste pleasant at all. He drank until his body didn't crave the water any more, then he made his way back to his "bed."

He fervently wished that Ford were with him now. If he were, the Commander would probably have at least three fully functional and well thought out escape plans in mind by now. The only thing firmly in Lucas's mind was the need for sleep and the vague desire for someone to tell him what was going on. As soon as his head hit the foul smelling mattress he was asleep.

What seemed only moments later, Lucas found himself being roughly shaken awake. He opened his eyes, recognizing the face of the man above him as the UEO officer who had first stopped him on the street. Lucas was fairly sure he had heard this man referred to as "Charlie," just before he'd been stunned. The difference was that Charlie had traded the UEO security officer's uniform he had been wearing for a set of scruffy looking civilian clothes.

"Get up, the Boss wants a look at you," he instructed Lucas.

Lucas didn't want to meet the person responsible for his kidnap laying down, so he did his best to comply to Charlie's command, but the pain and nausea caused by the stunner prevented him. Becoming suddenly impatient, Charlie reached down to take Lucas by one arm and yanked him to his feet.

Lucas fought down the urge to throw up, and for several long seconds he kept his eyes closed, concentrating on remaining standing. When he felt able, he reopened his eyes and shook himself free of Charlie's stabilizing hand. In front of him stood a tall, well dressed older man almost the same age as the Captain.

"Who are you? What do you want from me?" Lucas demanded, and cursed himself for allowing the fear he felt to creep into his voice.

The other man presented Lucas with an evil grin that held absolutely no humor at all. "So much like your father," he commented more to himself than Lucas.

Looking Lucas full in the eyes the older man continued. "What do I want? â€|" He paused a moment as if considering the question. "I want what is rightfully mine. I want restitution! As it is written so it shall be .. an eye for an eye .. a tooth for a tooth .. a son for a son," he finished coldly, badly misquoting the passage.

Lucas's blood chilled, both from the words and the deranged expression on the other man's face. *He's insane* Lucas realized with fright. There would be very little chance of reasoning with this man but Lucas still had to try.

"You want revenge? On who? Why am I â€|" Lucas began but was interrupted by the other.

"I want justice! Four years ago your father killed my son, Danny. They said it was an accident. That Danny made a mistake ... but I know it wasn't his fault. It was the machinery. It was faulty. The machinery your father designed. It failed and then Wolenczak wouldn't take responsibility for it - blamed the whole thing on Danny. Didn't

even say he was sorry. It's his turn to pay and I'm going to make sure he pays his debt in full. He'll be sorry now," The older man ranted. He had become so worked up by his mission that spittle flew from his lips as he spoke.

The breath caught in Lucas's throat as he understood the implications. This man intended to kill him in order to gain vengeance on his father. Lucas couldn't help thinking that the effort was going to be wasted. There was no doubt that his death would hurt his father, but it wouldn't be the soul stealing experience the man in front of him was hoping it to be. Lucas would die ... his father would be sad for a little while, maybe even months, then he would move on and Lucas would still be dead.

Captain Nathan Hale Bridger strode onto the bridge of the seaQuest. He had spent the last several hours trying to get into contact with Lucas's parents. In the end, he had deferred the job to Noyce, deciding an Admiral would have more success than a lowly Captain. Besides, Nathan had more important things to worry about, like finding the missing boy.

"Mr. Ford?" he asked coming to stand next to his XO.

"I'm sorry Captain, we have been totally unable to trace the vehicle. It disappeared shortly after the alarm was raised and we never got a lock on it. UEO security denied any involvement ... they say the men who took Lucas were impostors. We have no idea where they went, and we have no idea where Lucas is," Ford finished his report, frustrated.

Bridger patted Ford on the shoulder and nodded slowly to himself, thinking. "I find it hard to believe that with all the technological resources of this boat at our disposal, we have been unable to track one UEO vehicle through this city," he said thoughtfully, holding up his hand to forestall the objection that he could see forming on the faces of both his XO and the tactical officer, Ortiz.

"So that leaves us with two possibilities," Bridger continued, having gotten the full attention of the entire bridge. "One, before a trace could begin they swapped vehicles and left the port that way. Or two, they haven't left. It's a very big port and there are a lot of places you could hide a fifteen year old here without being spotted," the Captain finished, outlining his thoughts.

Ford nodded thoughtfully. "If they left the port in a civilian vehicle, the guard station would have a record of itâ€¦ Mr. Ortiz.. " The commander began to order the tactical officer to look into all the possibilities.

"I'm on it commander," the tactical officer replied, already working on the problem before the order was completed.

From the light filtering through the high ventilation slits near the roof of the building, Lucas could tell it was full daylight outside, but without the benefit of windows he had no idea of the exact time. From the hunger pains in his stomach, he knew he'd been here a long

time. He wondered idly if it was the same day that he'd been taken or if he been gone for more than a day. He also wondered if his kidnappers were planing to feed him anytime soon, he was starving ... throwing up earlier hadn't helped much either. Getting up, he made his way to the enclosed area to use the facilities and have another drink. Most of the side-effects of the stunner had worn off, leaving him with a splitting headache and a drained feeling.

When he returned, Lucas sat back down on the mattress and began to systematically check each link of the chain for weaknesses. He figured that the first step to an escape would to be to get free of the chain. If he could find a weak link maybe he could exploit it. After almost half an hour he had identified several potential weak links in the chain. Choosing the one he believed he had the most chance of breaking, he set to it, using the small, nail like piece of metal he had liberated from the toilet's cistern.

He tried his best to ignore the growls of hunger coming from his stomach as he worked at the link. The time passed slowly and he found himself wondering more and more about his friends on the seaQuest, the Captain in particular. Did they even know he was in trouble? If they did ... were they worried about him? He knew he could be a pain and annoyed them from time to time, but he also thought that, at least some of them, had begun to care for him. He never meant to be difficult, but sometimes it seemed like he just couldn't help himself. He thought of his behavior over the last day he had been on board ... constantly trying to avoid the Captain. When he'd last seen Bridger, he had been in such a bad mood that he hadn't even said good-bye to him. As much as he didn't want to acknowledge it, Lucas was very aware that he might never see the Captain or anyone from the seaQuest again. It hurt to think the last contact he would ever have with the Captain would be an angry, selfish one.

Once he started thinking about it he couldn't stop himself. Every short tempered comment, all the ill thought out remarks and the uncaring things that he'd done came flooding back to him. Being cursed with an almost perfect memory didn't help matters. To make it worse, he could recall very few times in the impressively long list, when his actions had been at all justified.

The self-anger made him work harder at the link, for a while. Eventually, he grew tired and sore handed from the work and had to stop. Inspecting the link he was dismayed to see how little progress he had made against the strong metal of the chain. The hunger, exhaustion and depression finally getting the better of him he fell into a troubled sleep, haunted by the disappointed looks of his friends.

An indeterminate time later, Lucas was again wakened by Charlie, who pulled him to his feet and sat him in the plastic chair. Charlie shoved something into his hands. Lucas took the cardboard sheet automatically, not yet fully awake. Glancing down at it he read the clearly printed instructions on the front. The message was 4 simple lines. His father's name, a bank code number, a surprisingly large sum of money, and a date/time.

Lucas glanced up at the three men facing him. Charlie stood in the middle with a portable vid-cam. The older insane man stood to

Charlie's right, a grin of anticipation on his face. As Lucas watched, the red record light came on the camera. The older man nodded to the third man, standing to Charlie's left. Lucas suddenly realized that the third man was completely dressed in black and was wearing a ski mask. Lucas's heart leaped into his throat when he realized what that could mean. His suspicions were confirmed when the man stepped toward him.

The man in black strode forward to calmly observe Lucas for a few moments, as the young man tapped his hands nervously against the side of his leg. Lucas watched him terrified, as the man in black hauled off, then punched him full in the face. A moment later Lucas found himself on the floor dazed and in pain. He was roughly grabbed by the hair and pulled to his feet, only to be struck again this time in the stomach. Lucas doubled over gasping for breath, as he felt the blood begin to stream down his face. Several more vicious blows fell before he found himself on the floor again.

Able to do little else, Lucas tried to roll away from his attacker, but was given a sharp painful kick to his lower back for the effort. He heard himself crying out in pain and tried to crawl further from the attack. The man followed him, landing several more kicks to his side and back.

"That's enough Tony, We've got what we need," Charlie told the man in black. Lucas was relieved to hear that ... he rolled onto his back, trying to ease the pain he felt there.

"Too bad, I was just starting to have fun," Tony commented in an offhand way, delivering a final solid kick to Lucas's side as he turned away from the boy.

Lucas gasped, feeling something give in his abdomen. He lay gasping for some time from the pain it caused. Barely able to move at all, he finally crawled his way back to his mattress. It wasn't much, but he needed all the comfort he could find. Looking around the room he was relieved to see that it was empty, the men had gone and he was alone. Quietly, unable to help himself, tears began to flow down his face.

"Captain, we're receiving a transmission for you from UEO Security," Lt. O'Neil reported over the communications line in Bridger's cabin. The Captain had been resting, or at least trying to, after Dr Westphalen had threatened to have Crocker and a security team physically removed him from the bridge if he hadn't agreed.

"I'll take it in here," he told the communications officer as he pulled himself up from his bunk. The screen cleared to show his old friend, Admiral Bill Noyce

"Nathan, good you're alone," Noyce began.

"What is it, Bill?" Bridger asked, trying to get his friend to the point as quickly as possible. He could tell it wasn't good news, and he knew his friend well enough to know that given a chance he would hedge around the issue as long as possible.

"Nathan, Dr Wolenczak's office just received a video ransom demand

from Lucas's kidnappers. Nathan it's not good, they â€| " Noyce trailed off

"Just play it Bill," the captain told his friend, preparing himself mentally. The last time Bill had called him "Nathan" more than twice in an official communication, it had been to tell him that his son, Robert, had been killed.

The screen cleared again, this time revealing Lucas seated on a chair in a large empty room, no windows, cement walls and floor. The boy held a ransom note in his hands. Nathan read the note, but its contents barely registered in his mind. He concentrated instead on Lucas himself. He looked sick ... his face was pale, his clothes were the same ones he'd been wearing when he left, and his hair was disheveled.

Nathan watched a look of horror cross the young boy's face and one hand drop to tap nervously on his leg. He felt a similar look form on his own features as a man entered the camera's view. Without speaking the man stood before the terrified teenager and with no warning struck the boy hard. Nathan felt his blood go cold as he heard Lucas cry out in pain and fall from his chair. The man didn't stop his attack with that, instead he escalated it. The last view Bridger had of him, Lucas had just slumped to the ground and was whimpering in pain.

Nathan felt sick, unable to fully accept what he had just seen. It was inconceivable to him that someone could treat any child like that, much less Lucas. He was silent a long time before realizing that Bill was still on the vid-link. He looked up into the concerned face of his friend.

"I'm sorry, Nathan," Bill told him at last.

Unable to find his voice, Nathan nodded his appreciation for his friend's concern. Noyce seemed to understand and continued, "I've called in all my resources on this Nathan, we'll find him," Noyce attempted to reassure his friend.

"Thanks Bill, he's still only just a kid you know," Bridger replied his voice still strained.

"I know â€| I'll be in touch," the admiral said, ending the transmission and giving his friend the privacy he needed to deal with what he'd just seen.

Bridger sat in his cabin for some time afterward. At least his body did, his spirit spent that time in a cold cement room with a badly beaten boy.

Finally, the captain realized he couldn't hide in his quarters indefinitely. He was going to have to share this information with his senior crew, and it wasn't going to be easy. Maybe they'd at least be able to get some clue where to find their missing member.

"Commander, have Dr Westphalen and Lt. Krieg come to the bridge immediately," Bridger ordered his second in command tiredly as he sat down in his bridge chair. From the corner of his eye, he noticed a flash of silver. Going to the bridge moon pool he pulled on the

release lever. Reaching in as the cover slid back, he let his hand glide across Darwin's skin.

"Bridger sad," the dolphin stated through the vocorder. Bridger felt a sudden sharp pang of pain as he realized he'd begun to take the fact for granted that he was able to communicate with his dolphin friend this easily. It hurt because the person solely responsible for it was alone and hurt somewhere. Most painful was the realization that he, the Captain of the mighty seaQuest, couldn't seem to do anything about it.

As soon as the all the senior staff made there way onto the bridge, Nathan addressed them. "Lucas's kidnappers have released a video ransom demand. Prepare yourselves, this is â€| horrible," the Captain finished, unable to think of an appropriate word to describe what his staff were about to witness. Captain Bridger stood still, as he again watched the events unfold on the vid. He heard but barely registered Kristen's gasps or O'Neil's quietly mumbled prayers. He kept his attention focused on the screen, concentrating on Lucas ... he felt he owed the kid that much at least.

Moments after the vid ended, the stunned silence was broken by an artificial voice.

"Lucas fish," the voice said loudly in the silent room.

It took Nathan a moment to realize that it had been Darwin speaking through the vocorder.

"Lucas fish!" came the dolphin's excited cry again.

Bridger cupped the animals snout in one hand as he stroked it's melon with the other.

"I'm sorry pal, Lucas can't give you any fish right now ... he's missing," he told the dolphin softly, realizing Darwin must not have understood what had just been shown on the screen.

Darwin ducked his head under the water for a brief moment, then blew a short shot of spray through his blowhole ... an action Bridger recognized as annoyance.

"Lucas SAY fish," Darwin clarified loudly.

Bridger was confused for a moment, then he spun back around to face his communications officer. "Lt. O'Neil, play back that first part of the ransom again," he commanded him anxiously.

O'Neil complied rapidly and the screen once again showed Lucas seated in the chair, the boy tapping his leg in fear, as the attacker approached him.

"Stop it ... back it up 3 seconds and watch his hand," Bridger ordered this bridge staff.

They watched Lucas' hand, as for an instant it stopped its insistent tapping to make a quick gesture. "There, did you see it!" Bridger exclaimed. "That's the hand signal for fish. Lucas is trying to tell us something. Take it back to the start again O'Neil," Bridger said

"Yes sir!" O'Neil replied, hope fairly dripping from his voice.

The entire bridge watched Lucas for a moment before Ford spoke with amazement, "Morse code. "

"What's he saying?" Westphalen asked unable to read the erratic taps.

"Three menâ€¦ that fish signâ€¦ quiet hereâ€¦ seagull â€¦ insane â€¦ kill m," Ford said reading out the taps for the doctor.

"Stop it!" The captain ordered O'Neil as the tape moved on to the beating. The Captain was certain he would be unable to watch that part again. The recording obediently vanished from the screen.

"All right everyone, Lucas has given us something to work with. It's up to us now. I think it's fairly clear we are dealing with 3 kidnappers and Lucas believes they are going to kill him," Bridger paused, uncomfortable with his own words, before continuing. "The seagull reference probably means that Lucas can either see or hear seagulls where he is. That puts him near the sea - somewhere quiet away from a populated area. Anyone with ideas on the fish sign?" Bridger asked.

"It could just mean more of the same, that he is near the ocean," Ford supplied

Ortiz spoke up, "Maybe, but it doesn't seem right. I mean, why fish? Unless he's under water he's not going to see any fish and if he were, then he wouldn't be able to see or hear seagulls," he reasoned out loud.

O'Neil nodded in agreement with his friend. "Besides, I don't think Lucas would have repeated a point, even if he was scared. He'd know how short a time he had to get the message across," O'Neil said, picking up on Ortiz's train of thought.

"Maybe he thought we wouldn't recognize the sign," Ford said falling into the role of a devil's advocate.

Nathan shook his head. "He would know I would recognize it. The fish means something ... but Ortiz is right, he wouldn't be able to see fish and seagulls at the same time and since fish don't make much sound... I don't see how he could have both of them near him," he said.

"That's it!" Westphalen cried. "Nathan, he may not be able to hear the fish, but what if he can smell them," she finished excitedly.

"Cement floorâ€¦ an old processing plant. O'Neil check the records find me every abandoned plant anywhere near this dock that has ever processed a fish," Bridger ordered.

"Yes sir!" O'Neil acknowledged, waving Ortiz over to help him with the search.

"Hang on Lucas, we're coming," Bridger thought to himself. He felt Kristen briefly squeezed his shoulder and realized he must have said

it aloud.

Lucas groaned as he woke, still in the same awkward position he had fallen asleep in several hours earlier. "At least no one is hitting me," he thought morosely. His stomach felt terrible. It felt as though someone had force fed him a bucket of broken glass. He rolled over and sat up, sending a sharp wave of pain through his body and making him gasp out aloud.

He'd paid only a cursory interest in studying medicine, but he could tell he was in a bad way. Apart from the multitude of bruises covering his face and body, he had an intensely sore cheek bone and suspected it might be broken. The swelling from the injury had partially closed his right eye, leaving him a narrow slit to view through on that side. His ribs didn't feel too good either, and his spine was on fire where he had been kicked. He was also fairly certain he was bleeding internally, he couldn't tell how serious it was but it definitely hurt enough to be bad.

Fighting off the exhaustion, he picked up his make shift tool from where he'd hidden it and went back to work on the chain. He knew he had to get free quickly, the kidnappers had given his father just over a day to get the money. Lucas knew he had to be gone by then. Even if his father did pay, which he had no illusions about, he knew the kidnappers planned to kill him.

He'd tried to give as much information as he could to his friends on the seaQuest through the ransom vid, but he wasn't sure they would even understand his message. He'd been truly afraid when he'd sent the message and knew that his code had been garbled. Hopefully, it had been clear enough to understand and they recognized it for what it was.

Lucas thought of how the Captain must have felt when he watched that tape, and felt an irrational flash of guilt at the pain it must have caused the older man. He worked harder at the chain, venting his frustration on the stubborn link. As he chipped at the link again, it occurred to him that he seemed to spend a great deal of time causing the Captain problems. He knew Bridger cared for him, he was pretty sure the captain cared for him more than his own parents did. Sometimes Lucas felt the captain would care for him even if he hadn't been dumped on the man's boat, and forcibly made his responsibility.

Lucas stopped his attack on the chain's link as it struck him how much he was missing the captain at that moment. Some how he just knew, if he could get free and find his way back to Bridger, then everything would be all right. All the pain he was feeling would go away and everything would just go back to normal. He missed the others from the seaQuest too but none of them even half as much as he missed the Captain. He had to get back to the seaQuest. He renewed his attack on the link with vigor. He was rewarded with a sharp metallic snap as the weakened weld joint he'd been working on, at last gave way.

"Yes!" he cried out in victory, looking at the broken link. It took only moments to lever it open enough to slip the next link out and suddenly he was free. Tremors of excitement racked through him as he

struggled to his feet. The pain in his stomach turned acidic, and he closed his eyes, willing the nausea to stop. It did no good and he threw up repeatedly. Dimly, he wondered how he could be throwing up at all, since he hadn't eaten anything. He choked out the last of his stomach contents, feeling dizzy-sick and weak, but strangely better.

He turned away from the mess he'd made of his bedding with his eyes still closed, having no desire to see it, and grateful that he no longer had to sleep there. He never saw the large, dark red sticky, puddle of blood smeared across the mattress.

Still operating on pure adrenaline, Lucas made his way to the door and was mildly surprised to find it unlocked. After a moment he realized it made sense. His kidnappers would hardly have expected him to be able to get free of the chain, several feet of which was still attached to his ankle, so why lock the door? Besides, the door was old and not very secure. It would have been pointless and a little suspicious to have secured it or replaced it .

Opening the door a crack and peering out, he was blinded momentarily by the harsh afternoon light. He was surprised to find himself surrounded by buildings ... he had been expecting to see the ocean near by. Picking a direction, he began to move away from the building as fast as he could. The street appeared to be deserted, but Lucas kept up his rapid pace, afraid that at any moment, the men would return and recapture him. He hurried on for several minutes, changing directions at random.

In the distance, Lucas spotted 2 UEO security officers leaning casually against a vehicle. He ducked into a nearby alley. He was moderately sure the men who had captured him weren't real UEO officers, but he wasn't completely certain. Even if they were impostors, they obviously had penetrated UEO security. He knew if he were to be held by UEO security, Charlie and his friends would come after him. He was the only one who was able to identify all three of them, they couldn't let him live.

The only safe way Lucas could see out of the mess he was in, was to get into touch with the seaQuest directly, and have them come for him. Slinking back into the alley's shadows, formed by the high buildings, Lucas watched the security men. He waited, hoping they would leave their car unattended for a moment. It would only take him a few seconds to "borrow" some communications equipment from it and then he could get a message to the captain.

As he watched, it became apparent that the men were having lunch and had no plans to move from their spot for a while. Lucas decided to get some rest while he waited to see what the men would do. He leaned against the wall, letting its stored warmth soak into his aching back, and releasing some of the pain there. All of the adrenaline had washed out of his system, leaving him tired and shaky. He sat down behind some of the broken boxes that littered the narrow ally, so they could shield him from view. Keeping his back pressed to the wall, he tried to concentrate on the relief he felt in his back, rather than the growing discomfort in his stomach.

Lucas found himself wishing someone were with him ... even Ben's insistent optimism would be welcome compared to the oppressive loneliness he felt. He'd been lonely before, he'd spent most of his

life alone, but couldn't remember a time when the feeling had been this pronounced. Tears coursed their way down his cheeks making clean trails in the grime. Lucas wasn't even aware of the tears as he cried himself to sleep for the second time in as many days.

Captain Bridger was very unhappy. They had spent almost a day checking all of the seaside warehouses and other potential buildings, but had come up empty. They were running out of time. Admiral Noyce had already informed him that Dr Wolenczak was not going to be able to raise the money. Bridger wondered if Lucas' father had ever really tried. He knew, if he had the funds himself, he would have paid the ransom ... anti-terrorism policy be damned. Unfortunately, there was no way he could get anywhere near the amount being asked. It enraged Nathan that people considered money more important than a child. So important that they would chose it over the child or even worse would hurt a child to get it. Since the ransom deadline was not going to be met, Nathan was left with just a few short hours to find Lucas or the unthinkable was going to happen.

"That's it. That's the last one," O'Neil reported, depressed, from his station. Bridger didn't need a clarification of the comment, he knew what it meant. Crocker and his security team had just reported in that the last building had been checked and there was no sign of Lucas.

"Damn! Mr. O'Neil, I want you to run your check again, we have to be missing something. Put the map up on your screen," Bridger ordered the younger man. Commander Ford joined his captain at the communication officer's station. Both stood staring at the map as O'Neil reran his list. Each building on the map that had been considered a potential was highlighted in red. One by one they turned green, as the list was compared with the ones Crocker's team had already checked. Soon the coastline of the map was littered with green dots.

"That's all of them," O'Neil stated as he finished the comparison.

Ford stared at the display, something wasn't right about it. Something buried deep in his memory prickled at the edge of his consciousness. Slowly the memory from his youth crystallized and he knew why the map disturbed him.

"Captain, wasn't there a marine adventure park here years ago?" Ford interrupted the Captain's concentration, pointing to an inland location on the map.

"Hey, yeah! I remember that place. It was here," O'Neil exclaimed, pointing to a location slightly to the left of Ford's position.

"Your point Commander?" Bridger asked his XO, not seeing any connection to their search.

"Sir, they had these big open air pools where you could watch the marine life—they were tidal - fed. The company built these big underground waterways to the sea," Ford elaborated.

The pools would still be there, full of fish and attracting the attention of hundreds of seagulls the Captain realized. "An inland seaâ€¦" Bridger trailed off understanding what his senior staff were telling him.

"Mr. O'Neil get a list of every possible building on that site to Crocker," the Captain ordered

It only took Tim O'Neil a few minutes to get his list together. Despite the size of the park, there weren't many buildings that fit Lucas's descriptions well enough. Most of the construction had been prefabricated, probably the company trying to save money, Tim thought. The entire site had been bought by the UEO after the adventure park company had gone bankrupt, and it was being used as a low security storage facility.

"How long till Crocker gets there?" Bridger asked his XO.

"His ETA is 23 minutes, sir. He's at the other end of the port," Ford replied unhappily.

"We're closer," Bridger observed. "Get a security team to the docking bay immediately. We can be there in less than 18 minutes," Bridger ordered, then held up his hand to forestall the argument he could see brimming in Ford's eyes. They'd had that argument, the one about the Captain exposing himself to danger, more times than he could count.

"Don't worry Commander, we'll wait for Crocker's team unless absolutely necessary," Bridger assured his second in command.

Ford nodded his head in acceptance, he wasn't pleased by the Captain's decision to go but he knew there was no way to stop him. Not with Lucas's life on the line.

Captain Bridger walked quickly into the docking bay, moving with a purpose. For the first time since the whole mess had begun, he had something useful to do. He'd been going crazy knowing Lucas needed his help and not being able to give it to him. The thought of what the boy had already endured horrified him. The thought of what was going to happen to him if he wasn't found quickly terrified Nathan more than he thought possible.

He still felt the raw pain of his own son's loss everyday. It was a gaping wound in his soul, he wasn't sure he could survive a second loss. He knew with certainty that if Lucas didn't survive this ordeal then neither would he ... at least emotionally. Lucas had begun to reawaken something in Nathan that he thought had died long ago. If Lucas died like this that spark would be smothered, and Nathan doubted anything would ever reawaken it again.

He hadn't known Lucas that long, just a few short months, but he had already become deeply attached to the kid. Many of the crew, and all of the senior staff, had formed similar attachments of varying degrees to Lucas. He was an irrepressible source of energy on the boat, full of the intense excitement that teenagers thrived on. Being honest with himself, Nathan had to admit he'd formed a much deeper bond with Lucas than anyone else on the seaQuest. Their friendship was different, tempered by the respect Lucas had for him and by his returning advice and guidance. Their friendship had transformed into

more of a father - son type of relationship. It was a relationship Nathan intended to keep.

Bridger moved silently along behind Mars, the tall dark security man, who lead the rescue team. Even though he was the Captain, he had deferred leadership of the team to Mars. He trusted his people to know their jobs and he knew that Crocker had a great deal of faith in Mars. He also didn't want to create a problem, by having the security team focus on him, rather than Lucas.

The team crept silently through the space formed between two buildings, it was too narrow to qualify as an alley. Ahead of them, across the roadway, Bridger could see their target building. This was the building that O'Neil had identified as the most likely candidate. Mars held up his hand, a signal to the team to stop. Bridger watched the security leader as he quietly observed the building for a long moment, before turning back to his team to give them a rapid series of hand signal commands. The rest of the team signaled their understanding of the orders, including the Captain, which earned him a quick glance of surprise from the normally unflappable security man. Bridger smiled slightly at the reaction, the hand signals Mars had used were from the same set that he and Crocker had used when they were both still new to the service.

Mars had given very simple orders. Olson was to stick to Bridger's side and keep him back, the rest were to take flanking positions by the only door to the building. Instead of giving the order to go, Mars again held up his hand for the team to hold position. A moment later the Captain saw why, a car was pulling up in front of the target building. With growing anger, Bridger watched three men get out of the car. These were the men who had tortured Lucas. Mars acted quickly, swiftly reordering his men. Before the Captain registered what was happening, Olson had blocked his exit to the street as the rest of the team streamed out, their weapons drawn.

In seconds they had the three very surprised kidnappers surrounded and disarmed. Only after all three of the men were in custody did Olson allow Bridger to leave his protection. Nathan wasted no time with the men in custody, he went straight to the door. Mars and two of his security men beat him to the door, and entered the building first.

The building had been gutted, leaving a single huge vacant room. Obviously it had been converted into a storage room at some stage in its history. The instant Nathan entered the room, he knew it was the right place. The building reeked of stale fish and he could hear the seagulls squabbling and fighting on the shore of the tidal pool, which bordered the rear of the building. Even without the smell and sound, he would have been sure it was the right place ... the image of this room had been burned deeply into his memory forever.

"Lucas!" he called out, his voice echoing in the silence.

There was no answer. Tires screeched outside as several vehicles pulled up quickly. Nathan wasn't surprised when moments later Dr Westphalen and Chief Crocker burst through the door.

"It's the right place, but Lucas isn't here," the Captain greeted the pair.

"Damn," Kristin swore, clearly upset.

"Captain, Chief over here," Mars called from the far wall of the room. Bridger, Crocker and Westphalen hurried over to see what Mars had found.

"Sweet Jesus!" Crocker muttered, looking down at the browning pool of blood soaked into the the filthy mattress.

Westphalen knelt to examine the blood. "Nathan, It's still fresh. It hasn't been here for more than half an hour," she said after a moment.

Mars bent and lifted up a length of heavy chain. "It looks like they had him chained here," he commented.

"Yes. But it seems he got free," Crocker added, holding up the broken link he'd found for the others to see. He turned it slowly in his fingers examining the small nicks on the metal.

"If he got free, why the blood and why hasn't he contacted us by now? Half an hour is a long time. Crocker, get one of those men in here now," Bridger ordered. Crocker nodded without replying and left to do as he'd been asked. Moments later he returned, half dragging Charlie with him.

"What happened here? What have you done to Lucas?" Bridger demanded of Charlie, advancing menacingly toward the man. When Charlie didn't answer immediately, Bridger grabbed his shirt neck and dragged his face up close to his own.

"Where is he?" Bridger asked in a low dangerous voice, his eyes hard and cold. Charlie panicked and despite the promise he had made to himself about not helping the cops, he blurted out a response.

"I don't know. He was right here when we left him," Charlie told the seaQuest Captain, pointing down at the mattress at their feet.

"Where did all this blood come from?" Bridger demanded, tightening his grip.

"I don't know... I really don't," Charlie choked out, truly beginning to fear for his life. "I swear he wasn't bleeding that much when we left him," Charlie finished pitifully.

Despite himself, Bridger believed him. He shoved the man back toward the waiting security guard, Olson, and wiped his hand on his pants leg as if to remove the contamination of the touch. Olson lead Charlie back outside at Crocker's nod.

Bridger took out his PAL and called the seaQuest. "Commander, get in touch with Noyce, we need some people with tracking equipment. Lucas was here and has freed himself but he hasn't made contact yet. It looks like he's hurt pretty bad. We need to find him fast," Bridger updated his second in command and closed the communication after Ford's acknowledgment.

Nathan took the broken link from Crocker's hand and examined it

carefully.

"Looks like he did it with this," Crocker informed the Captain, holding up the small metal nail he'd found. Bridger took the nail and examined it as well. It must have taken Lucas a lot of hours to break that link, using just that nail. Nathan felt an up swell of pride in the teenager. Alone and obviously hurt, he hadn't given up. An image formed in Bridger's mind, of Lucas chipping determinedly away at his chosen link. The same look of intense concentration he always wore, when working on a difficult project, on his young face. Bridger resolved himself to make the effort to tell the kid how proud he was of him if ... when ... they got him back.

It wasn't long before another car pulled up outside the building. Nathan could hear the distinct sound of a dog barking. Seconds later the tracker and his "equipment," a large dog of uncertain breed, came through the door. Noyce wasn't kidding when he'd promised "every resource" Nathan reflected. The tracker took his dog over to the Captain and the others.

"Afternoon, Captain. I'm Ed, and this here's me dog Elvis. The Admiral tells me you've gone and lost one of your men?" Ed said, introducing himself in a jovial voice.

"His name is Lucas ... he's 15 and he's hurt," Bridger told Ed pointing to the drying pool of blood, a little upset at the mans apparent lack of concern.

"15! What's a 15 year old doing on ..." Ed began shocked, his attitude changing instantly.

"It's a long story, one that can wait till after we find him," Bridger cut the other man off, not wanting to get into a detailed discussion on how Lucas had come to join the seaQuest crew.

Ed nodded, surprise at Lucas' age still evident on his face. He knelt down next to Elvis and stroked his head. "Elvis. Lost!" he told his animal, pointing to the blood. Elvis obediently began to sniff the blood and surrounding bedding. The dog became increasingly excited as it did.

"He's got the scent now," Ed told the watching humans. He took his dog's head in his hands and looked directly into the squirming animal's eyes. "Elvis. Lost. Find him!" he commanded.

Elvis yapped happily and took off, full pace, for the door, dragging Ed with him by his lead. Nathan and the rest of the seaQuest crew followed closely behind. For some time, Elvis led a twisting path through the abandoned buildings before stopping at the entrance to an alley. Nathan rushed forward, ahead of the rest and went into the alley. He found Lucas just inside, laying slumped against the alley debris. He knelt next to the boy, and with a trembling hand, checked for a pulse. He closed his eyes in relief when he felt the rapid fluttering beat under his finger tips.

"Kristen!" he called out urgently.

Kristen pushed her way through the gathered crowd of seaQuest crew members, still breathless from running and trying to keep up with the group.

"Stand back. Give me some room." she ordered, kneeling on the other side of Lucas and beginning her examination. Lucas was covered in bruises and blood, some of it already drying, some of it still oozing slowly from numerous cuts. There was nothing external that could account for his obvious blood loss, which left only one option, an internal injury.

"We need to get him to the seaQuest now," she ordered, already getting to her feet.

Nathan gathered Lucas into his arms and lifted his limp weight with barely a grunt. Lucas was tall for his age but he was also painfully thin, weighing much less than he should. Despite Nathan's effort to be gentle, Lucas moaned softly and opened his eyes.

"It's all right now kiddo, I've got you," Bridger told him, as Lucas' eyes focused blearily on his face. Lucas smiled slightly before he lost consciousness again.

Nathan carried Lucas to the waiting car Mars had brought up. He settled Lucas on the back seat and moved out of the way so Westphalen could get in. Nathan went toward the front seat, as Crocker got in behind the wheel. Before getting in, he turned to Ed, who was crouched down beside Elvis. "Thank you both, more than I can say," he told the man.

Lucas floated. It was quiet and warm ... he couldn't remember a time when he'd felt so comfortable. Curiosity got to him and he wanted to know where this incredibly comfortable place could be ... he had to remember it so he could come back later. The only problem was, he had no idea how to find out. He thought about his dilemma for a while, before realizing that if he opened his eyes he might be able to work it out. Opening his eyes turned out to be a lot harder than he remembered it. Finally he managed it and he looked around the blurry room.

A shape next to him spoke, "Lucas it's okay, your safe."

Lucas stared at the distorted shape for a while, until he recognized it. "Captain? You're all blurry," Lucas whispered, smiling at the funny distorted image of the Captain. The Captain smiled too, distorting his features even more.

"I'm sorry about that. I'll try to fix it later. Okay?" the Captain replied.

"Okay," Lucas agreed, happy that the Captain would sort out the problem with his face.

"How are you feeling?" the captain asked him, concerned.

Lucas thought about it for a while before answering. "Tired ... sore too ... but mostly just tired," he said.

"That's okay Lucas, you get all the rest you need. I'll take care of everything," the Captain reassured.

"Mmm" Lucas mumbled, beginning to let sleep take him. Then he remembered something important. Opening his almost closed eyes, he

tried to focus on the Captain.

"I'm really sorry. That I tried to avoid you. And all the other terrible things I've done," Lucas told the captain sincerely, tears filling his eyes and blurring the Captain's face until it was unrecognizable.

"Hey. Hey, calm down. It's okay, kiddo. I still love you anyway," the Captain said, wiping away the moisture and gently ruffling Lucas' hair.

"Y-You do?" Lucas asked, amazed.

"Yeah, I really do," the Captain assured him.

Lucas smiled and finally allowed his exhaustion to claim him. Nathan looked down at the sleeping boy and smiled to himself, his first real smile in what seemed a lifetime. He was immeasurably grateful to have the kid back. Dr Westphalen had assured him that Lucas was going to make a full physical recovery, but he had been seriously concerned about the emotional impact of the ordeal.

Nathan knew it was going to take a while, but he could feel that Lucas was going to be fine, the kid was unbelievably tough. He was going to get over this experience, all it was going to take was time and some one who cared. Lucas' father had finally contacted the seaQuest, just long enough to be told that Lucas would recover. It was obvious Dr Wolenczak wouldn't be available to provide Lucas with either care or time in the near future. Nathan picked up Lucas' pale hand and whispered to the unhearing boy, "Don't worry Lucas I'll see you get all you need of both."

Finita.

End
file.